

Introduction

The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads Staff Ride An Exercise in Leadership Training

The staff ride concept was pioneered at the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in the 1890s. By 1906 the first staff ride had taken place at the Chattanooga battlefield, Tennessee. The concept continues to evolve today. The staff ride concept is meant to expand and supplement Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, June 1993, by placing soldiers, well grounded in the theory of battle, on actual battle sites to study and critique the tactics and strategy of that engagement. The staff ride concept is one that takes the study of war and warfare from the theoretical to the practical by using historical examples on the actual terrain where the battle occurred.

The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads was fought on 10 March 1865 by a Union cavalry force consisting of two brigades and one artillery section of the 3rd Cavalry Division under the direct command of Brevet Major General Hugh Judson Kilpatrick, U.S.A., and *Hampton's Cavalry Command*, consisting of *Wheeler's Cavalry Corps* and *Butler's Cavalry Division*, under the direct command of *Lieutenant General Wade Hampton, C.S.A.* The action was fought with both mounted and dismounted troops, the Federal troops dismounted and the Confederate troops generally mounted. This staff ride uses the convention of setting Confederate units, ranks, and names in italics.

The Civil War had little more than a month to run in its bloody course when the Battle of Monroe's Crossroads was fought. Confederate armies were depleted and nearly exhausted after four years of bitter fighting while the Union retained major reserves of manpower and materiel. The Confederates retreated before General Sherman's March to the Sea. On 20 December 1864, they evacuated Savannah, Georgia and later Charleston, South Carolina. Following the fall of the state capitol, Columbia, on 16 February 1865, the Confederates conducted delaying actions across the Carolinas, buying time to concentrate their forces. The

Confederate Army intended to force a major battle in North Carolina, hoping to set the stage by defeating Federal columns before they could join together. If this effort proved successful, the Confederate Government still hoped to enter into negotiations with the United States for a cessation of hostilities on favorable terms.

President Lincoln and the Army's commander, General Ulysses S. Grant, U.S.A., intended to crush the rebellion and reunite the Union. The only conclusion to the war they would accept was complete capitulation of the Confederate States of America, with an eventual goal of an entirely reunited United States of America.

SETTING THE STAGE

Monroe's Crossroads was a small Civil War battle involving about 4,000 men. The action was an engagement of mounted Confederate cavalry against dismounted Union cavalry. The fight lasted several hours on the morning of 10 March 1865.

The Confederate assault was a deliberate attack against a poorly guarded and sleeping Union camp. While initially routed, the Federal cavalry recovered and counterattacked, pressuring the Confederates to relinquish the camp.

Anticipating the approach of Federal infantry, the Confederate commanders ordered their troops to disengage from the action. Then *Hampton's Cavalry Command* withdrew in good order toward Fayetteville, North Carolina.

The Confederate attack delayed the Federal Cavalry's movement toward Fayetteville, denying Brevet Major General Kilpatrick the honor of entering the town first.

The Battle of Monroe's Crossroads gained the additional time needed for the Confederate infantry to conduct an organized crossing of the Cape Fear River at Fayetteville unmolested by the advancing Federals. With their troops and equipment east of the

Cape Fear, the Confederate Army burned the bridges as the Union forces entered the city.

SMALL ARMS AT MONROE'S CROSSROADS

Immediately prior to the Civil War, a technological revolution, the development of the rifled-musket, overtook tactical doctrine and had immense consequences for the first three years of the war¹. Napoleonic tactics of shoulder-to-shoulder massed infantry assaults resulted in high casualty rates when pitted against the rifled-musket which had an effective range of more than 1,000 yards. Tactics had adapted to the technology by the war's end, and the cavalry were no exception. Prior to the Civil War, an attacking force enjoyed a great advantage. The tactics and firearms in use at the time were not enough to counter the sheer momentum of a well-executed attack.

During the Civil War, the attackers' advantage was diminished. Rifling and conical bullets increased effective ranges and accuracy; percussion caps and fixed rounds increased the rate of fire and reliability of small arms. It was not uncommon in Civil War battles for an attacking force to suffer 40 to 50 percent casualties before closing with a defending foe or being repulsed.

At Monroe's Crossroads an extensive variety of small arms were used², from the most advanced magazine-fed carbine to earlier model muskets and shotguns.

While a degree of uniformity existed within the Regiments of the Federal Cavalry, the Confederate Cavalry was armed with an extensive assortment of makes and calibers. Being armed with such a variety of weapons created logistical problems for the Confederate Cavalry. The Confederates' deficiency in all classes of supply prompted them to be alert for the opportunity to secure additional food, weapons, ammunition, and mounts. Their necessary habit of acquiring supply by confiscation and battlefield pick-up exacerbated their logistical problems.

Union cavalymen were well armed and equipped by war's end³. Each man was generally armed with a six-shot revolving cylinder percussion pistol, a saber, and a carbine. The pistol was generally a .44-caliber Colt or Remington revolver. However, some men preferred the lighter weight .36-caliber Colt Navy revolver to the larger caliber models. Each man carried at least 24 rounds of ammunition for the

revolver. The cartridge, carried in a leather pouch hung on the saber belt, was a self-contained linen or nitrated paper cartridge with a black powder propellant charge and a lead conical bullet. Round ball bullet rounds were also used. Each soldier also carried a supply of percussion caps to prime the nipple of his revolver for firing. Archeological evidence from the Monroe's Crossroads battlefield demonstrates that the Colt and Remington .44-caliber revolvers were the favored pistols, although at least one metallic cartridge revolver was also used, a 12mm pinfire pistol. The saber, although rarely used in combat during the latter years of the war, was nevertheless a standard issue item. Generally, cavalry carried the Model 1859 (also known as the Model 1860) light cavalry saber. Many volunteer regiments armed themselves with a saber of similar style, although foreign-made.

There were numerous types of carbines in many different calibers issued to cavalry units during the latter years of the Civil War. The Union regiments at Monroe's Crossroads were variously armed with single-shot .52-caliber Sharps breechloading carbines (percussion ignition with a nitrated paper or linen cartridge), .54-caliber Burnside breechloading carbines (percussion ignition with a metallic cartridge case), .56-56-caliber Joslyn breechloading carbine (rimfire metallic cartridge), and the magazine-fed repeating seven-shot .56-56-caliber Spencer carbine (rimfire metallic cartridge). In addition, the dismounted 4th Brigade (Provisional) was armed with either the .58-caliber or .577-caliber rifled-musket issued with an 18-inch long triangular bayonet. Each soldier carried his ammunition in a leather pouch, separate from the pistol cartridge pouch, on the leather saber belt. Generally each man was issued 40 rounds of ammunition, which was expected to last the length of almost any battle.

The rifled-musket and various carbines used conical lead bullets. The carbines had a shorter lethal range than the rifled-musket, ranging from 500 to 750 yards. However, most battles were fought at ranges of 200 yards or less, very often at 100 yards or less, and even hand-to-hand. Confederate small arms, by late in the war, were diverse. They were a mixture of Confederate arsenal manufactured weapons, imported firearms, and captured Union weapons. The Confederates were particularly fond of Union breechloading carbines and took them as trophies of war whenever possible. Ammunition had

Table 1 Archeological Evidence of Firearms Types at Monroe's Crossroads⁴		
Firearm Type	Represented in Archeological Collection	Represented in Private Collection
.30-caliber (unknown)	—	Yes
.36-caliber (unknown)	—	Yes
.40-caliber (unknown)	Yes	—
Colt .44 revolver	Yes	—
Remington .44 revolver	Yes	—
.44 Henry rifle	—	Yes
12 mm revolver (?)	—	Yes
.50 Smith carbine	Yes	Yes
.51 Hall (?) carbine	Yes	Yes
.52 Sharps	Yes	Yes
.54 Starr carbine	—	Yes
.54 1841 rifle (?)	Yes	Yes
.54 Enfield/Austrian	Yes	Yes
.54 Burnside	Yes	Yes
.56-56 Joslyn	Yes	Yes
56-56 Spencer	Yes	Yes
.577 Enfield	Yes (bullets)	Yes (musket parts)
.58 Springfield	Yes (bullets)	Yes (musket parts)
.69 muskets	Yes	Yes
Shotguns	Yes	Yes
3-Inch Ordnance Rifle	Yes (case & canister)	Yes (complete shell)
Total	20 firearms types	

to be captured as well because the Confederate arsenals were unable to produce adequate supplies of ammunition for their own weapons, let alone captured Union weapons of unusual caliber. Some Confederate units at Monroe's Crossroads were armed with single and double barrel shotguns as their primary weapons.

Only one Confederate account provides any specificity to the armament at Monroe's Crossroads. *Colonel Charles C. Jones', C.S.A.*⁵, report of inspection for January and February 1865 notes ammunition itself was in short supply. The men

were noted to be carrying from 35 to 40 rounds per man as an average. The report noted *Lieutenant General Joseph Wheeler's, C.S.A.*, ordnance train carried an ammunition reserve of only slightly more than 40 rounds per man. The armament of the men was identified as mixed. Most men carried the Colt Navy or Army revolver, but the shoulder arms were a mixed lot.

As a general rule, there is a great want of uniformity in the armament of this command. The principal weapons in the hands of the

Table 2 Federal Weapons at Monroe’s Crossroads⁶	
Edged Weapons	
	Bayonet, triangular — 4th (Provisional) Brigade
	Saber —Mounted units
Pistols	
	Model 1858 Remington Army revolver .44 inch
	Model 1860 Colt Army revolver .44 inch
Rifles and Carbines	
	Springfield rifled musket .58 inch—4th (Provisional) Brigade
	Smith carbine .50 inch
	Sharps carbine .52 inch
	Burnside carbine .54 inch—1st Alabama Cavalry Regiment
	Spencer carbine .56–56 inch—5th Ohio Cavalry Regiment
Artillery	
	2 X (3–Inch) Ordnance Rifle Cannon—Stetson’s Section, 10th Battery, Wisconsin Light Artillery
	Projectiles: 3–Inch Hotchkiss shell and canister

men are the long and short Enfield rifle, the Springfield musket, the Austrian rifle, a variety of breech-loading rifles, viz.: the Spencer, the Burnside, Sharp, Maynard, & c., and various kinds of pistols.

Many, if not all, of the breech-loading rifles and pistols are captured arms; for some of them, as the Spencer, there is great difficulty in procuring the requisite amount of ammunition, the supply now in the cartridge boxes of the men, and in the ordnance train, having been obtained exclusively by capture.

With such a variety of calibers, and in view of the fact that the supply is at best but limited and uncertain, for at least some of the guns mentioned, it becomes almost a matter of impossibility to secure at all times the proper amount of ammunition.

There should be a greater uniformity in the armament of the regiments, and if possible brigades.

The best evidence for small arms use at the battle is derived from the archeological record. Table 1

shows there is a true diversity in small arms types and caliber used in the battle, as evidenced in the archeological findings.

Nevertheless, this diversity is typical of most Civil War battles where standardization of arms and ammunition was not a major component of the Quartermaster and Ordnance Departments. They were the branches then in charge of development and procurement of arms.

Tables 2 and 3 list additional weapons used at the Battle of Monroe’s Crossroads as gathered from various historical sources. Capabilities of the various weapons used in the battle are listed in Table 4.

FIELD ARTILLERY

Prior to and during the Civil War, there were a number of advances in artillery systems. However, their effects were less dramatic than those of small arms. Development of new types of projectiles and fuzes produced more lethal but less reliable artillery ammunition. Rifling of cannon tubes increased ranges, but did little to improve accuracy.

Many Civil War soldiers continued to prefer the

Table 3 Confederate Weapons at Monroe's Crossroads⁸	
Edged Weapons	
	Saber
Pistols	
	Model 1858 Remington Army revolver .44 inch
	Model 1860 Colt Army revolver .44 inch
	Unknown .40 inch
Rifles, Muskets, and Carbines	
	Model 1841 "Mississippi" rifle .54 inch
	Model 1841 South Carolina "Palmetto" rifle .54 inch
	Enfield musket .577 inch
	Rifled musket .58 inch
	Musket .69 inch
	Hall carbine .52 inch
	Smith carbine .50 inch
	Sharps carbine .52 inch
	Burnside carbine .54 inch
	Joslyn carbine .56 inch
Shotguns	
	1., .40, .50, .58, .62 inch and Buck and Ball—common in the Texas Brigade

older smoothbore cannon. In a desperate fight, a dependable old piece firing solid shot at long range, followed by canister, then double canister, could devastate an approaching enemy battle line. Artillery of the time was always employed in a direct fire mode to augment the fire of the infantry⁹.

Although there was experimentation with artillery organization, the traditional technique of providing artillery support by imposing a command relationship between the artillery unit and the supported unit continued. The practice of assigning or attaching artillery to maneuver organizations tended to decrease its effectiveness by precluding the massing of fire on lucrative targets at critical times.

Luckily for Civil War soldiers, the greatest advance in artillery would not come until after the war, with the advent of a recoil mechanism and indirect fire.

A single section of two, wrought-iron 3-Inch

Ordnance Rifles (Model 1861) were present at Monroe's Crossroads. The 3-Inch Ordnance Rifle was a muzzle-loading gun served by a crew of eight. It fired elongated projectiles with a lead driving band around the iron shot or shell. It fired shell, case shot, or canister shot. Shell and case shot were exploded by one of three types of nose fuze (a paper or wooden time fuze trimmed to burn for one to five seconds and a percussion fuze). Shell was a hollow, soft iron, elongated projectile filled with black powder. When the projectile burst, it spread large chunks of iron fragments meant for antipersonnel effect. Case shot, used in a similar manner as shell, was an elongated projectile containing a black powder charge and many .69-caliber lead balls.

Lethal range was up to 3,000 yards. Generally, artillery was employed at much shorter ranges. Canister was usually used at ranges of less than 400 yards. It was a sheet iron can filled with lead balls

<div> <div>Table 4</div> <div>Weapons Capabilities¹⁰</div> </div>		
Weapon Type	Effective Range	Rate of Fire
Pistols		
Colt revolver, six-shot	20—50 yards	6 rounds in 10 seconds
Remington revolver, six-shot	20—50 yards	6 rounds in 10 seconds
Rifles and Muskets		
U.S. rifled musket, muzzle loaded, .58 Inch	200—300 yards	3 rounds per minute
Enfield rifled musket, muzzle loaded, .577 Inch	200—300 yards	3 rounds per minute
Smooth-bore musket, muzzle loaded, .69 Inch	50—100 yards	3 rounds per minute
Carbines		
Spencer carbine, breech loaded, seven round magazine; the Spencer, “Quick Loader,” ammunition box contained 8 magazines	150—200 yards	8 rounds in 20 seconds
Sharps carbine, breech loaded, single shot	150—200 yards	9 rounds per minute
Burnside carbine	150—200 yards	9 rounds per minute
Shotguns		
Single and double barrel	50—100 yards	3 rounds per minute
Artillery		
3-Inch ordnance rifle	1,800 yards	2 rounds per minute

or .75-inch iron balls. It was used strictly as an antipersonnel round. In extreme cases, the guns could be double charged with canister, a rather desperate maneuver. Archeological evidence from Monroe’s Crossroads demonstrates that the shell and case shot fired during the battle were of the Hotchkiss type (a well-known manufacturer of artillery ammunition during the war).

TACTICS

Tactical Doctrine during the early years of the Civil War was heavily influenced by the Napoleonic Wars and the United States’ War with Mexico (1846-1848)¹¹. Close-order infantry assaults with bayonets gleaming, cavalry charges with sabers flashing, and

direct fire by artillery in front of the line gave way to more discrete tactics by 1863. Both Union and Confederate commanders saw appalling casualty rates using these tactics against the commonly used rifled-musket. Artillery was no longer able to mass to the front of an infantry line and pound the enemy. The range of the rifled-musket was equal to that of the artillery, allowing the infantryman to pick off gun crews at will. The time-honored cavalry charge to break the infantry line was no longer feasible, again due to the long range and accuracy of the rifled-musket. Again, the infantryman could easily decimate a cavalry charge before it was well underway.

Finally, the infantryman armed with the rifled-musket could destroy a close-order infantry charge

[Go back to Table of Contents](#)

[Go to next page](#)